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SUBJECT: TALABANI BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON TOUR OF ARAB STATES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Iraqi President Jalal Talabani on November 20 briefed the Ambassador on his recent trip to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, saying he received a warm welcome in each and made some progress towards improved diplomatic and economic relations. Turning to other issues du jour, Talabani pledged to mediate between opposing parties on the Turkey-PKK crisis and negotiations over the Strategic Partnership Declaration (SPD). End Summary.

Recap of Talabani,s Travels

¶2. (C) The Saudi and Egyptian governments accorded Talabani a warm reception, but their distrust of Prime Minister Maliki surprised even the Iraqi President. Saudi King Abdallah reportedly portrayed Maliki as hopelessly sectarian and subservient to Iran. Talabani even reported that a senior Egyptian official asked him to verify reports that Maliki is Commander-in-Chief of the Jaysh al-Mahdi. In reply, Talabani said his key message to these governments was that Riyadh and Cairo need to reengage in Iraq because mainstream Iraqi Sunnis had stopped fighting the US, Iraqi Shia look to Najaf and not Qom, and Iranian influence in Iraq should come as no surprise if the Arab neighbors refuse to provide a counterbalance.

¶3. (C) Talabani was most sanguine about his visit to Kuwait. Amir Sabah pledged to send Ambassador-designate General Ali Mumin to Baghdad as soon as Iraq sends an ambassador to Kuwait, and to open a consulate in Basrah. The Amir expressed support for trade between the two countries, leading to a friendship agreement, a \$60 million pledge, and a plan to send 35 Kuwaiti businessmen to Kurdistan and afterwards to the rest of Iraq. Talabani also noted the Amir,s hand is constrained by Kuwait,s increasingly assertive National Assembly and its wariness about engaging Iraq or moving forward on debt relief. Talabani cited these as his reasons for addressing the Assembly and meeting with Assembly Speaker Jasim al-Khorafi.

Turkey-PKK Crisis/SPD

¶4. (C) Turning to the Turkey-PKK crisis, Talabani claimed relations between Ankara and Iraqi Kurds are improving, noting positive statements about Iraqi Kurds by the head of the Turkish opposition. Talabani predicted a larger Turkish

strike against the PKK, but said this was tolerable as long as other Iraqis are not harmed. The Iraqi President also expressed support for the Turkish government proposal to establish a joint operations center to monitor the PKK situation.

15. (C) On the Strategic Partnership Declaration, Talabani said there was no reason for any major Iraqi leader to oppose the text. The draft contains broad principles about which all Iraqis could agree, and more contentious details could wait for subsequent negotiations. On this principle, Talabani asserted he would assuage Deputy President Tariq al-Hashemi's remaining concerns at that evening's Presidency Council meeting. (Note: Talabani may have partially succeeded, as Hashemi the following day told the Ambassador he would delegate negotiations over remaining details to two advisors, despite some lingering objections to the declaration.)
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